

VZCZCXRO8987
PP RUEHDBU RUEHPW
DE RUEHBUL #0721/01 0840659
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 250659Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7910
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000721

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/22/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: KARZAI RAISES QUESTIONS ON U.S. ROLE IN AFGHAN
ELECTIONS

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) In his March 19 meeting with Deputy Special Representative Paul Jones, President Karzai cited certain rumors asserting that some Afghans were suspicious of U.S. objectives in the upcoming election. He added that a number of Afghan politicians claimed U.S. backing for their candidacies. Jones made clear the U.S. position: we supported continuity of authority in the post-May 22 period and through to the inauguration, but we had no favored candidate in the election. Karzai will soon seek a formal Supreme Court interpretation on the continuity of authority issue. Ambassador Wood informed Karzai he would depart post on April 3.

Perceptions of U.S. role in Presidential politics

¶2. (C) Karzai turned much of the discussion toward the presidential elections and perceptions (ostensibly of "the Afghan people" but equally his own) of U.S. interference in the political process. He objected to past conduct of U.S. authorities who "permitted" a former U.S. Ambassador to "campaign for president for over two years." He characterized the circumstances as a sign of disrespect to Afghanistan, and warned that the Afghan people would expect greater transparency in U.S. actions, or the United States risked growing distrust from the people.

¶3. (C) Karzai cited a number of opposition figures, specifically Ashraf Ghani, Anwar Ahadi, Gul Agha Sherzai and Mirwais Yasini, who claimed U.S. backing for their candidacies. Karzai again argued that such rumors and perceptions fed into growing Afghan mistrust of U.S. objectives in the Afghan political process.

¶4. (C) Karzai claimed some Afghans believed the United States had two objectives in the electoral context: (1) to create and then support an opponent to Karzai and (2) to divide the Pashtun vote. Karzai explained that he had held off on formally declaring his candidacy because he wanted to maintain his position and stature as the president to unify the country.

¶5. (C) Jones reiterated that the United States had no favored candidate in the election. In fact, everyone knew that the United States supported continuity of authority in the post-May 22 period and through to the inauguration. Some could interpret that as the United States backing Karzai. In fact, the United States would be neutral on the election.

Continuity of authority

¶6. (C) Karzai said a number of attendees at a recent International Women's Day event urged him not to step down in favor of an interim authority. They cited the turmoil from the 1992 Rabbani interim authority, which extended its rule beyond its deadline. Karzai also pointed to a recent statement by Herati mullahs also declaring their opposition to an interim arrangement.

¶7. (C) Karzai told Jones he wished to resolve the uncertainty over this issue. He planned soon to ask the Supreme Court for a constitutional interpretation of his authority to continue as president in the post-May 22 period. Once the Supreme Court delivered its interpretation, Karzai would then take up the issue with the Parliament. He threatened to call for a Loya Jirga if he could not reach a consensus with Parliament.

¶8. (C) The Ambassador reiterated our position that Karzai should continue in office through the post-May 22 period. He urged Karzai to engage opposition leaders privately to seek a practical solution that would avoid confrontation over the issue. It would be helpful if Karzai would provide MPs something to enable them to accept his continuity. Public humiliation of the opposition would be a mistake. After some back and forth, Karzai agreed to consult the opposition, but insisted he could not concede anything that would be outside the constitution.

Other issues

KABUL 00000721 002 OF 002

¶9. (C) Tripartite meeting: Karzai agreed with Jones' assessment that the February 26 tripartite meeting began a constructive discussion among the three countries, particularly on intelligence sharing on cross-border issues. Jones extended an invitation to Afghanistan to attend a follow on session scheduled for May 6-7.

¶10. (SBU) Ambassador's Departure: Ambassador Wood concluded the meeting by informing Karzai that he would depart Kabul on April 3. Karzai lamented the Ambassador's departure, citing the sometimes difficult substantive exchanges they had had, but citing the loss of the Ambassador's departure given his deep expertise on Afghan issues.

¶11. (U) Deputy Special Representative Jones cleared this message.
WOOD